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Akbar in Film

Jalal-ud-din Muhammad Akbar ruled as third Mughal Emperor in India throughout the latter half of the sixteenth century. Akbar is often credited with laying the foundation for the Golden Age of the Mughal empire seen under the rule of his grandson, The Shah Jahan. Akbar instituted a myriad of large scale reforms spanning from the abolition of pilgrimage tax to the reworking of the Mughal governing system, to a functional administrative bureaucracy that incorporated conquered subjects for the betterment of the empire. However, as a man who lived 400 years ago Akbar's legacy is defined by how he is remembered. This paper examines how the changing political and cultural tides in India have affected the historical memory of Akbar that is presented in cinematic illustrations of his character and which of those illustrations are accurate.

One of the central cultural issues fluctuating throughout India that influences film is the complex status of Hindu-Muslim relations. Film centered around religion is often a risky task to undertake for a Bollywood filmmaker. As recently as *OMG* (Umesh Shukla, 2012) and *PK* (Rajkumar Hirani, 2014), which were both severely cynical of current religious culture and traditions, film questioning religion can be extremely controversial. For context, Hindu-Muslim relations have drastically improved over the last 55 years. However, during and following the split of India and Pakistan, India was filled with violent religious riots and bloodshed which were followed by decades of bitter sentiments. As recently as 2002, large groups of Hindu fundamentalists killed over a thousand Muslim people in Gujarat which was under the jurisdiction of Chief Minister Narendra Modi. Modi was equivocally blamed for not putting in effort to end the violence in the Gujarat State. Narendra Modi was elected Prime Minister of

India a decade later. Essentially, relations have improved since partition times, though there has been a recent surge in anti-Muslim fundamentalism. The source of this conflict is quite often traced back to the conquest of India by Islamic leadership, specifically the Mughal Empire and consequent misinterpretations of Hindu Muslim relations throughout the Mughal period. This paper argues that because of the depth of the historical conflict between the two factions in relationship with the Mughal Empire's legacy, recent cinematic illustrations of Akbar are a direct product of the cultural sentiments and political environment of India at the moments of their production. Akbar was an immensely effective leader of the Mughal Empire and is depicted poorly at times of worsened Hindu-Muslim relations.

The life of Akbar the Great remains a popular subject and has been scrutinized quite thoroughly. Work done analyzing Akbar is typically concentrated around a small set of subjects. Primarily historians examine the Mughal Conquest under his rule, which was likely a result of the myriad of dominant campaigns undertaken by Akbar, from Panipat to the Rajputana and Gujarat. However, the significance of Akbar's conquest goes further than simply expanding the territory of the Mughal Empire: one of the key reforms he instituted involved incorporating conquered leaders instead of beheading them and taking the rest slaves after a victory, as was tradition. Another subject of focus in analysis of Akbar was his unique approach to religion. Perhaps a result of disillusionment with traditional Islam or as a strategy to rule more effectively, Akbar abandoned Islam and founded the eclectic religion *Din-i Ilahi* which was accepted by several in his court and was far more amenable to the Mughal subjects than was traditional Islam. Furthermore, the abolition of the pilgrimage tax encouraged loyalty from Hindu subjects. The Economic and Administrative Infrastructure under Akbar was another area of significant focus. To bring together the Mughal empire, which sprawled across the Indian subcontinent,

Akbar instituted a centralized system and set the precedent for utilizing marriage as a conciliatory tool for alliance with conquered Hindu rulers. Finally, perhaps the most controversial, is analysis regarding the role and degree of influence of the nine jewels wherein some doubt their effectiveness in the reign of the empire while others assert their influence was essential to the rule of Mughal Empire. Some of the notable scholars in this field of study include John F. Richards,¹ Irfan Habib,² P.S. Bedi,³ W. H. Moreland,⁴ Ishtiaq Hussain Qureshi,⁵ S.R. Sharma⁶ and S.M. Burke.⁷

In his book *Power, Administration and Finance in Mughal India*, Richards compiles an analysis of the intricacies of the Mughal Empire and its administration during its reign over India from the mid-1500s to the early 1700s. Richards advocates the vitality and effectiveness of the Imperial System of the Mughal Empire, specifically focusing on Akbar and Jahangir. Section two of Richards' study referring to the Imperial System is especially important in that it analyzes Akbar's economic policies and consequences of his inter-religious marriage to a Rajput Mariam-uz-Zamani, or Heer Kunwari. Richards refers to several primary accounts of Akbar's personality,

¹ Richards, John F. *Power, administration and finance in Mughal India*. Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Pub. Co., 1993.

² Habib, Irfan. *Akbar and his India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000.

³ Bedi, P. S. *The Mughal nobility under Akbar*. Jalandhar: ABS Publications, 1985.

⁴ Moreland, W.H. *From Akbar to Aurangzeb: A Study in Indian Economic History*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1994.

⁵ Qureshi, Ishtiaq Husain. *The administration of the Mughul empire*. New Delhi: Low Priced Publications, 1973.

⁶ Sharma, S. R. *Mughal empire in India*. Agra: Lakshmi Narain Agarwal, 1966.

⁷ Burke, Samuel M. *Akbar, the greatest Mogul*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1989.

including that of Father Monserrate, all of which converge on Akbar's friendliness to his common subjects.⁸

In *Akbar and his India*, Irfan Habib argues that Akbar proceeded to subjugate the Rajputs because of the essential role played by their *zamindars*, as was requested of Akbar in the will of his late father, Humayun. The major themes presented in Habib's book are that Akbar's India blossomed economically, and his militaristic policy was derivative of his father, yet his diplomacy deviated drastically from that of Humayun. Habib also depicts Akbar as a patron of the arts, encouraging music, painting and literature.⁹

P.S. Bedi's *The Mughal Nobility Under Akbar* focuses on how the nobility adjusted under Akbar and the effects that had. Bedi describes conflicts that arose for Akbar's predecessors, Babur and Humayun, who were unable to establish firm relationships and struggled with their nobilities. As Akbar succeeded to king, the nobility could maintain their statuses, provided with economic incentives and even a discrete loan system. Bedi argues that these facets of Akbar's court fostered a cooperative relationship between the throne and his court, which paved the way for economic prosperity.¹⁰

W.H. Moreland's *From Akbar to Aurangzeb* is an informal and direct address of the various aspects of the economic climate surrounding the Indian subcontinent from the reign of Akbar to the ascension of Aurangzeb. Moreland's depiction of the economic climate and institutions Akbar left behind for his son Jahangir is key. Throughout his section on Jahangir, Moreland frequently emphasizes how integral Akbar's economic institutions were by describing

⁸ Richards, John F. *Power, administration and finance in Mughal India*. Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Pub. Co., 1993.

⁹ Habib, Irfan. *Akbar and his India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000.

¹⁰ Bedi, P. S. *The Mughal nobility under Akbar*. Jalandhar: ABS Publications, 1985.

how they remained almost untouched throughout the reign of Jahangir and accounted for much of the economic prosperity of Jahangir's time. For example, Moreland mentions Akbar's policy of subjugating and incorporating into his own court the nobility of the Rajputana. This policy was used effectively by Jahangir on the frontiers.¹¹

Qureshi's *The Administration of the Mughal Empire* analyzes the Mughal Empire at each level of authority. He focuses on the fundamental role religion played in the court and how influential the advisors could be to each monarch. Qureshi's piece regarding central authority is especially relevant to Akbar as it analyzes the empire's immense geographical and economic growth as well as the role of Islam in Akbar's court. Akbar was known to stray from orthodox Islam and eventually created *Din-i-Ilahi*, which borrowed primarily from Islam, Hinduism and Christianity. Qureshi criticized Akbar's convoluted eclectic religious views because they diminished the influence of the Muslim authority at the time.¹²

S. R. Sharma's *Mughal Empire in India* provides an emperor by emperor analysis of the 300-year Mughal rule. He isolates specific characteristics of Babur, Humayun and Aurangzeb and assesses their shortcomings as rulers. Sharma follows a similar in assessing the remaining emperors and attributes the rise and eventual peak of the Mughal Empire to the leadership capabilities of Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan. His analysis of Akbar was centered around attributing Akbar's day to day ruling and caricature as a product of his court. From Bairam Khan to Abu-l Fazl, Sharma attributes Akbar's qualities as a ruler solely to their teachings, which

¹¹ Moreland, W.H. *From Akbar to Aurangzeb: A Study in Indian Economic History*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1994.

¹² Qureshi, Ishtiaq Husain. *The administration of the Mughul empire*. New Delhi: Low Priced Publications, 1973.

provides a fresh perspective, contrasting with the innate greatness of Akbar that is so often emphasized.¹³

S. M. Burke's *Akbar, the Greatest Mogul* presents a thorough, yet certainly enamored, analysis of the life of Akbar the Great. Burke breaks down Akbar's life into two significant aspects, that of religion and that of politics. He focuses on Akbar's deep interest in the other major religions despite his illiteracy, because he was not satisfied with only the knowledge of his Islam. Furthermore, Burke focuses on the social deviance of Akbar's fourth marriage, which was to the Hindu Rajput Princess Harka Bai (Jodhaa). Lastly, Burke delves into Akbar's political career, which he suggests is certainly a product of the influence of Bairam Khan, Maham Anaga and eventually Abu-l Fazl. Burke underlines two things regarding Akbar's positive relationship with his subjects. First, was his abolition of the pilgrimage tax that previously hindered religious practice of the poor Hindus that made up a great deal of the Mughal Empire. Second, was Akbar's decision to convene daily with his subjects in person to hear their problems.¹⁴

No scholarship has been done on the cultural trends and political environment surrounding Hindu-Muslim relations and the cinematic illustrations of Akbar. I will be relating these trends to the illustrations and then relating them back to Akbar's effectiveness as a ruler and specific aspects of his capabilities or lack thereof as demonstrated in film. This is important because film is often key in the formulation of our opinions and thus inaccurate illustrations of Akbar and the Mughal Empire can contribute to the worsening of Hindu-Muslim relations. As the most credible source for the current religious conflict is an ancient grudge born of the poor

¹³ Sharma, S. R. *Mughal empire in India*. Agra: Lakshmi Narain Agarwal, 1966.

¹⁴ Burke, Samuel M. *Akbar, the greatest Mogul*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1989.

treatment of Hindu subjects by Islamic leadership that has been harbored for generations, it is essential this misconception is rectified as it has contributed to horrific acts of violence.

Akbar the Great has been a topic of some popularity in film as well as scholarship. *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960) is a renowned classic which recounts the epic love between Prince Salim (Son of Akbar, formally known as Jahangir) and a court dancer Anarkali. Prince Salim and Anarkali are madly in love, trying to escape the reach of his father, Akbar, who will not allow them to be together.¹⁵ This film was an absolute blockbuster and is without a doubt one of the highest grossing Bollywood films of all time. However, the film is only loosely based on history. Prince Salim is grossly misrepresented in the film as a gentle and romantic lover. When on trial for rebelling against the throne and sneaking out Anarkali, Salim refuses to return her and claims his father is the enemy of love. When Salim is offered a pardon if he is to return Anarkali, where she would face her punishment, Salim delivers this powerful monologue:

“Then the Emperor should also punish moths who sacrifice themselves onto the flame.

He should imprison honeybees that hover around flowers, singing love songs. Stop rivers that rush to lose themselves in the sea’s embrace.”¹⁶

Salim continues for some time, declaring that he wishes for no claim to a throne built on the death of Anarkali. The narrative that Prince Salim was a pure man committed to Anarkali yet bound by his father could not be further from the truth. Jahangir was a violent man who abused alcohol and opiates. Abu’l Fazl recounts several instances of his misconduct, at one point the Prince Salim was displeased with a message he received from his father and demanded the

¹⁵ *Mughal-e-Azam*. Directed by K. Asif. Performed by Dilip Kumar and Madhubala. India: Sterling Investment Corporation, 1960. Film.

¹⁶ Ibid

messenger cut off part of his own tongue.¹⁷ Prince Salim regularly abused the drugs at his disposal and committed countless cruel acts upon those around him; he was by no means a noble gentleman.

A key feature here is the release date of this film: 1960 was a time of very high religious tension in India. 1947 marked the Partition of India through the creation of the independent nation-states of India and Pakistan. The 1947 split is infamous for the large-scale Hindu-Muslim violence, riots that brutally murdered thousands. Religious tensions born of ancient enmity boiled over into a national bloodbath. Hindu-Muslim relations remained poor for years to come with several further instances of violence.¹⁸ These disputes were further perpetuated by conflicts like the debate over Kashmir and remnant conflicts from the British Raj. Countless acts of violence were carried out in the name of Kashmir, even leading to three separate wars. This film was released just in between the two Indo-Pakistani Wars of 1947 and 1965, times of peak tension between the two nations.¹⁹ Remnants of British divide and rule policies helped sustain the division across India.²⁰ It seems the misrepresentation of Akbar the Great coincided with a strong Anti-Muslim sentiment that swept India. At this same time, stories of impressive Hindu characters still proliferated. For example, *Jhansi Ki Rani* (1953) tells the tale of a brave Hindu

¹⁷ Fazl, Abu'l. *Akbarnama: Ain-i-Akbari*. Translated by H. Beveridge. Vol. 3. Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 2004. 1088

¹⁸ Doshi, Vidhi, and Nisar Mehdi. "70 Years Later." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 14 Aug. 2017, www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia-pacific/70-years-later-survivors-recall-the-horrors-of-india-pakistan-partition/2017/08/14/3b8c58e4-7de9-11e7-9026-4a0a64977c92_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.d3ef1ba3914d.

¹⁹ "Kashmir: Why India and Pakistan Fight over It." BBC News. November 23, 2016. Accessed May 09, 2018. <http://www.bbc.com/news/10537286>.

²⁰ Tharoor, Shashi. "The Partition: The British Game of 'Divide and Rule'." Israeli-Palestinian Conflict | Al Jazeera. August 10, 2017. Accessed May 09, 2018. <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/08/partition-british-game-divide-rule-170808101655163.html>.

princess who stood up courageously to the British.²¹ The disparity between the depictions of the two iconic historical characters exemplifies the influence of contemporary cultural and political environments.

Half a century later came another blockbuster, Ashutosh Gowariker's *Jodhaa Akbar* (Gowariker, 2008), a film centered around a king who eventually falls in love with the Hindu princess he married as part of the Rajput alliance while also describing his struggles with leadership of the empire.²² This film is of interest for two reasons. Primarily, the late-2000s marked a period of relatively better Hindu-Muslim relations which coincided with this idealistic representation of Akbar's rule and romantic life. One of the main causes of this was a far more religiously amenable government in power, led by the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh. One of the central social policies of Manmohan Singh was the equal ability of the Muslim minority to partake in "the fruits of development."²³ Prime Minister Manmohan Singh belongs to the Indian National Congress (INC) which is the foremost secular and liberal party in India. Second, the two-pronged intentions of Ashutosh Gowariker in the development of this film.

Gowariker's *Jodhaa Akbar* opens with a brief voice over explaining the history of the bloodshed over Hindustan and how it came to be that the Mughals, and eventually Akbar ruled Hindustan. This served as a prelude to the opening scene: The Battle of Panipat. The voice over explains the Mughal army was greatly outnumbered in comparison to the army of Hemu. The battle begins; Hemu and his elephants are marching through the Mughal army until Akbar's

²¹ *Jhansi Ki Rani*. Directed by Sohrab Modi. Performed by Sohrab Modi and Mehtab. India: Minerva Movietone, 1953. Film

²² *Jodhaa Akbar*. Directed by Ashutosh Gowariker. Performed by Hrithik Roshan and Aishwarya Rai. India: UTV Motion Pictures, 2008. Film.

²³ "Muslims Must Have First Claim on Resources: PM – Times of India." The Times of India. December 09, 2006. Accessed April 8, 2016.

sharpshooter, surrounded by a protective squadron, gets Hemu in the eye with an arrow.²⁴ As is accounted by Abu'l-Fazl, the two armies met on the battlefield at Panipat, the Mughal army standing at 10,000 with foot soldiers and cavalry while Hemu's army stood at 30,000, fortified by a unit of armored war elephants. Hemu began the attack with his armored elephants and rampaged through a wing of the Mughal army which was countered by a flanking of the elephants in a pincer movement with cavalry to damage the elephants and eventually walk Hemu into a trap where he was shot in the eye by an archer.²⁵ The biggest disparity between the two lies in that Hemu was not shot by a specific sharpshooter, rather he was simply hit during the ambush. Gowariker accurately illustrates the narrative of the battle.

In the Akbarnama, Abu'l Fazl describes Adham Khan's murder of Ataga Khan, defeat at the hands of Akbar and consequent execution in detail. He recounts how after murdering Ataga Khan, Adham Khan swung his scimitar at Akbar who evaded and struck down Adham Khan with a single blow of the fist. Akbar then gave the order for execution by tossing off the roof of the building yet the building was only ten feet high and thus required Adham Khan to be thrown twice²⁶”.

Ashutosh Gowariker not only presents this battle and execution, but further includes Akbar's personal apology to Maham Anga after executing her son, in which she says

“Adham committed a vile act and suffered the consequence; this is why I forgive you” as tears continued to stream down her face.²⁷ As accounted by Abu'l Fazl, Maham Anga uttered

²⁴ *Jodhaa Akbar*. Directed by Ashutosh Gowariker. Performed by Hrithik Roshan and Aishwarya Rai. India: UTV Motion Pictures, 2008. Film.

²⁵ Fazl, Abu'l. *Akbarnama*. Translated by H. Beveridge. Vol. 2. Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 2004. 64

²⁶ Ibid 272

²⁷ *Jodhaa Akbar*. Directed by Ashutosh Gowariker. Performed by Hrithik Roshan and Aishwarya Rai. India: UTV Motion Pictures, 2008. Film.

only “you did well” which was followed by silence and the “color draining from her face²⁸.” The degree of accuracy in the depictions of the above two scenes from the Akbarnama in the film demonstrates one of Gowariker’s reasons for making the film. In reference to Jodhaa Akbar, Gowariker has said he wanted to “fine-tune the details” and maximize the historical credibility of the movie. Though not devoid of a few embellishments, this film is historically accurate for almost all its major events, making it unique in that regard. This is significant because it matches a progressive Hindu-Muslim attitude with the only accurate representation of Akbar.

Gowariker also emphasized that he wanted to make the film “with religious tolerance as the theme, and I wanted to tell that story through Jodhaa Akbar.”²⁹ This motivation helps explain the major historical inaccuracy, the epic romance that develops between Jodhaa and Akbar, as this has no basis in the Akbarnama. *Jodhaa Akbar* (Gowariker 2008) was received quite well, ending up as one of the highest grossing films of the year. The film was also awarded critical acclaim from major Bollywood and international critics. That Jodhaa Akbar was received so well despite illustrating an ultra-progressive Mughal leader and thematically emphasizing religious tolerance speaks to the impact of the concurrent sociopolitical atmosphere under the INC.

Finally comes the TV show, *Jodhaa Akbar* (Arshad Khan, 2013-2015). Just like the movie before it, this soap opera is centered around the marriage of Jodhaa and Akbar, and its progress from a political alliance to an epic romance. The time at which this show began was a period of resurgence in anti-Muslim sentiments on the cultural front and this was reflected by the

²⁸ Fazl, Abu'l. *Akbarnama*. Translated by H. Beveridge. Vol. 2. Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 2004. 274

²⁹ Darade, Pooja. "Ashutosh Gowariker on Jodhaa Akbar." Brand. February 16, 2018. Accessed May 11, 2018. <https://www.pinkvilla.com/entertainment/news/ashutosh-gowariker-jodhaa-akbar-i-wanted-make-film-religious-tolerance-theme-398419>.

election of Narendra Modi a year later, in 2014, solidifying the influence of the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party). The BJP is the Hindu Nationalist party, historically rather conservative and often known for advocating against Muslim rights and equalities. The face of the organization, Narendra Modi, certainly fits the bill. As previously mentioned Narendra Modi was the Chief Minister of Gujarat when the mass killings happened, but that alone suggest no culpability. Human Rights Watch, an influential NGO, determined that the “state government and local police were complicit” in the rioting; the title of the report released by the Human Rights Watch was “We Have No Orders to Save You.”³⁰ Following in parallel, Akbar is depicted as an immature, headstrong and childish figure poorly suited to rule. He repeatedly proves himself incapable of leadership and is often saved by his nine jewels or some dramatic miracle. Akbar’s most redeeming quality throughout the soap is his talent for romanticism with Jodhaa. This show strays so far from historical accuracy that Ekta Kapoor, ex-producer for the show, stated that it was “80% fiction”³¹. For the third time, the depiction of key Muslim leadership is a perfect reflection of the cultural environment surrounding the subject. Moreover, as a result of this environment, the leadership capabilities of Akbar are grossly misrepresented and essentially extinct throughout the TV show.

Around this time also came *OMG* (Umesh Shakla, 2012) and *PK* (Rajkumar Hirani, 2014) as previously mentioned. Though these two films demonstrate progressivism in questioning religious authority, their critical response exemplifies the steps that have yet to be

³⁰ “We Have No Orders to Save You.” India – State Participation and Complicity in Communal Violence in Gujarat. Accessed April 06, 2018.

³¹ TNN. "Jodha Akbar No More under Ekta Kapoor's Banner? - Times of India." The Times of India. January 13, 2015. Accessed April 25, 2018.
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/tv/news/hindi/Ekta-Kapoor-no-more-producing-Jodha-Akbar-Ekta-Kapoor-disassociated-her-name-from-Jodha-Akbar/articleshow/31100734.cms>.

taken. *OMG – Oh My God!* is the ironic tale of a shrewd, atheist businessman who sells idols and other items of the Gods in his shop, which falls in an earthquake. However, this shop is not covered by his insurance because the earthquake termed an Act of God. The businessman, desperate for options, sues God in court in the hopes that the “agents” of God will pay for his insurance.³² This film thoroughly dismantles many of the money draining religious traditions that are observed at every such institution in India in a comedic fashion. Post-release however, many did not approve of the film. Alongside public unrest, Jalandhar State Mahila Congress Vice President Nimisha Mehta lodged a complaint against the lead actors (Paresh Rawal and Akshay Kumar) as well as against the producers of the film. The complaint was lodged because the film “hurt the religious sentiments of India” and it was requested that several scenes from the movie be deleted.³³ Akshay Kumar had to be given police custody as a result. This obviously is highly irregular as Akshay Kumar is undeniably a superstar in the Bollywood industry. Though *OMG* does not specifically focus on Mughal representations, it exemplifies the contemporary political environment set by the majority party, the BJP, and nationalist cultural sentiments which were also contributors in the making of the *Jodhaa Akbar* TV series.

PK (Rajkumar Hirani, 2014) brought about similar controversy. Aamir Khan plays a naïve extra-terrestrial alien who questions everything he sees (he appears completely human) and spends the film searching for his stolen transponder so he can return to his home planet. Throughout his journey he is repeatedly told “Only God can help you” and *PK* dives into a

³² *OMG - Oh My God!* Directed by Umesh Shukla. Performed by Paresh Rawal and Akshay Kumar. India: Viacom 18 Motion Pictures, 2012. Film.

³³ Singh, IP. "Oh My God - Police Complaint." *The Times of India*. September 26, 2012. Accessed April 23, 2018. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/bollywood/news-interviews/Oh-My-God-Police-complaint-against-Akshay-Paresh-Rawal/articleshow/16557075.cms?referral=PM>.

plethora of religious traditions, even some that involve self-harm, in his search for God. Eventually Khan comes to realize the large religious institutions and spiritual advisors are incapable of actually reaching God.³⁴ The film analyzes the questionable foundation behind modern day religious institutions by providing the perspective of an alien who questions everything instead of simply accepting things as we often do. The name of the film itself, PK is a play on words, PK sounds like '*peekay*' which translates to drunk, or intoxicated, in Hindi; Khan is so often called drunk for the questions he asks that he adopts it as his name. This irony enunciates the film's main motif about Hinduism: that asking questions is not the norm, yet it should be. Khan's journey to realization centers around questioning superstitions, which is the foundation of the controversy behind the film.³⁵ One such example is Khan questioning a priest's advice for a troubled follower who seeks spiritual aid for his paralyzed wife.³⁶

PK was widely boycotted across social media, even including twitter hashtags like *#boycottPK*. More importantly, the film was condemned by the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), a Hindu nationalist organization with strong ties to the BJP.³⁷ PK is yet another example of the rigid cultural sentiments of the early 2010s on controversial religious subjects, and their relation to the BJP being in power. One of Hirani's other works, *3 Idiots* (Rajkumar Hirani, 2009)

³⁴ *PK*. Directed by Rajkumar Hirani. Performed by Aamir Khan and Anushka Sharma. India: UTV Motion Pictures, 2014. Film.

³⁵ Pandey, Vikas. "Why Is Bollywood Film PK Controversial?" BBC News. December 26, 2014. Accessed April 26, 2018. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-30602809>.

³⁶ *PK*. Directed by Rajkumar Hirani. Performed by Aamir Khan and Anushka Sharma. India: UTV Motion Pictures, 2014. Film.

³⁷ Pti. "BJP, VHP Ties Strong." The Times of India. March 23, 2003. Accessed April 26, 2018. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/BJP-VHP-ties-strong-Ganesan/articleshow/41182978.cms>.

similarly mocked the religious traditions of stressed students in engineering college yet this film received no such condemnation and was the highest grossing film ever at the time.³⁸

OMG (Umesh Shukla, 2012) and PK (Rajkumar Hirani, 2014) embody the influence of the surge in religious and nationalist identities at that time. Both films clearly function as satire yet were received poorly by the people as well as political parties because the films deviated from the strong sense of Hindu religiously identity. These sentiments laid the foundation for the production of Jodhaa Akbar (Arshad Khan, 2013-2015) which severely neglected historical accuracy in illustrating Akbar. As an icon of Islamic leadership and power in India it follows that he was misrepresented during this time of Hindu nationalism.

While certainly not a man free of flaws, Akbar was an effective leader who left Hindu Muslim relations far better than he found them. Cinematic portraits of Akbar in modern Bollywood reflect the political climate born of contemporary cultural sentiments regarding the Muslim community. The historical memory of Akbar is of importance because ancient relations are believed to be the foundation of a tension between the two religious factions that seems ingrained, deep into the heart of society. This tension is the basis for a societal wound that affects people every day. It continues to fracture the nation today but perhaps properly remembering Akbar the Great.

³⁸ *3 Idiots*. Directed by Rajkumar Hirani. Performed by Aamir Khan and Kareena Kapoor. India: Reliance BIG Pictures, 2009. Film.

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